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THE AMAZING AND IRRITATING ERROR OF THE SUBWAY STATION

By SAMUEL HOWE

See pages 217 and 218

"**W**HAT error, we have little time for riddles?" naturally exclaims the thoughtful Gothamite in his impulsive fashion. "Is it lack of air, of light, of elbow room? If so, it is too big for ordinary discussion."

No. Our plaint, just now, is specific, it is timely, it deals with a condition which can easily be remedied, with which every one agrees. There is but one opinion. Dodge how we will, the amazing error is the adoption of signs that cannot be read. We fail to answer satisfactorily the question, "Where are we?" This is the perplexing riddle of the subway, the unanswerable query, omnipresent, defying, baffling. The question hangs over us, turn where we will, the element of uncertainty remains. We fail to see the name or number of the street and station.

During rush hours we may learn by the character, I had almost said the temper, the perfume, the impatience of the crowd and its movement, that the consensus of opinion ventures a guess at Grand Central or at Fourteenth Street or at the Bridge, as it resumes panther fashion its inclination to spring for the door. Perhaps between gasps we glean a response from a friendly traveler, who recognizes in the tunnel some distinguishing mark, a pier, a stairway, a thin flash of light, which momentarily gives an outline to a gloomy interior, accented by an engaging vista in the distance. Yet in vain we look for signs. We know they exist. That is the provoking part of it, for we have seen them as we parade leisurely down the platform; still, they are half buried in dust, practically illegible from a moving car.

The straphanger wears a tired look, an anticipatory expression tinged with apprehension as he bobs between the meeting rails, peering through the window, or stands still and silently listens to the conductor's voice, many octaves from its natural key, as he bawls some defying jargon of his own, confusing, perplexing, without informing. It is a toss-up, a puzzle, a farce!

"Where is the sign?" we ask. The problem in the subway is part only of a larger problem elsewhere. It confronts every public building or enterprising storekeeper, here and abroad. It is before the purveyor of public entertainment of every city. It has to be faced by the school, the opera, the church. The sign! The psychology of the thing, wholesomely treated, not in essay form, would make interesting many a doleful ditty or be a stimulus worthy any pen. Momentarily recalling the buildings of the Renaissance or of the Greeks, the "Goths" or the Mod-

erns, we realize the importance of the sign, the letter, appearing upon a conspicuous panel or assigned to a prominent place upon an entablature. It is towards the name plate or label we naturally turn to learn the character of the building, its function, its excuse for being. What wonder then, that where humanity is compressed, the stream of pedestrians concentrated into a small underground passageway, the sign is ever of fundamental importance. In the thoroughfare we have a thousand ways to determine our location, but we are helpless amid the cross-lights, the hub-bub and whirligig of the half-concealed station, wholly at the mercy of the authorities.

SUBWAY STATIONS IN BERLIN

The question of signs cannot be determined off-hand, nor is it wise to discuss the subject merely from an academic point of view. To be specific and to cite well-known examples, we can, thanks to the accompanying illustrations, visit Berlin without a passport, pausing for a moment to examine the subway service, and inspect, say the station under Uhland Street, Fig. 12, see page 218, and the one called Inselbrücke, Fig. 11, see page 218. These are central-platform stations with tracks on each edge. The roofing of the former is of the truss and column construction, while a low, flat three-centered arch spans the latter. The names are displayed in oval-shaped countersunk panels upon the side walls, which are lined with glazed white brick. The letters are less than a span in height, black upon a white ground. Note how conspicuous they are. They are so frequent that, as the train stops, two, at times three signs appear opposite each car, telling the passenger where he is. The signs are on a level with the eye as the traveler is seated; they are, so to speak, a slap in the face. He cannot escape them. If standing, he looks down upon them, and if sitting, they tickle his nose. Overhead, suspended at right angles to the platform, the name again catches the eye, and there are no advertisements to confuse and mislead him. The passenger is still further assisted in his quest by the map of the city, appearing at the end of the car, an extract of the one near the ticket office. Here it occupies the position of honor at the end of the entrance hall. Look, for instance, at the Wittenberg Place, Fig. 1, see page 217, and Thiel Place stations, Fig. 2, see page 217, stimulating illustration of the advantage of ceramic treatment of wall surfaces and the use of vari-colored and molded tile. The designer assigns to a prominent place advertisements that must be gratifying to the management as a source of income. Nevertheless, the fine stations of Berlin re-



FIG. 1. ENTRANCE HALL AT WITTENBERG PLACE, BERLIN

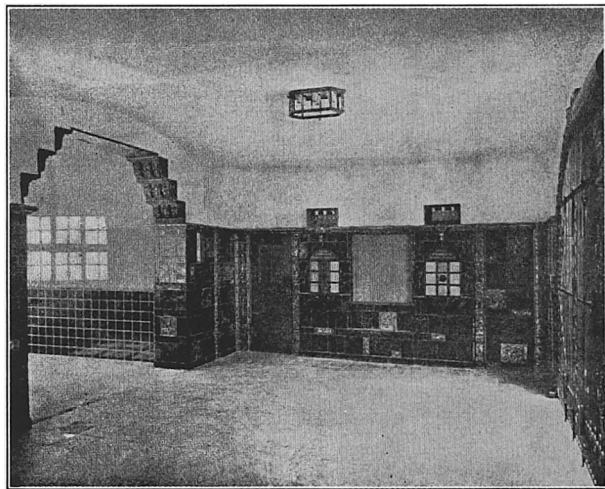


FIG. 2. TICKET OFFICE AT THIEL PLACE, BERLIN



FIG. 3. PORTE DE VERSAILLES STATION, PARIS



FIG. 4. CONCORDE STATION, PARIS

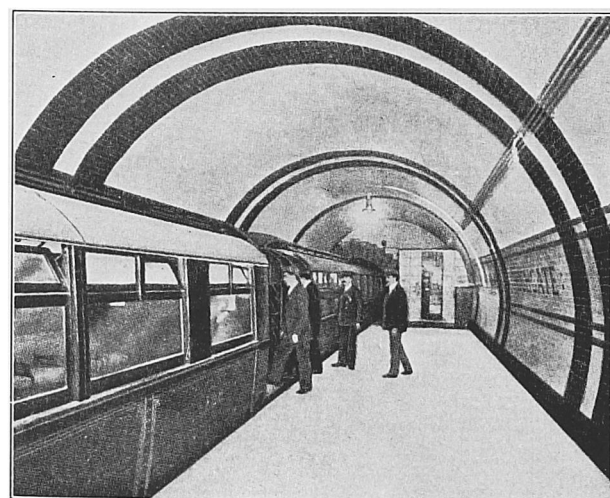


FIG. 5. HIGHGATE STATION, LONDON



FIG. 6. PICCADILLY STATION, LONDON

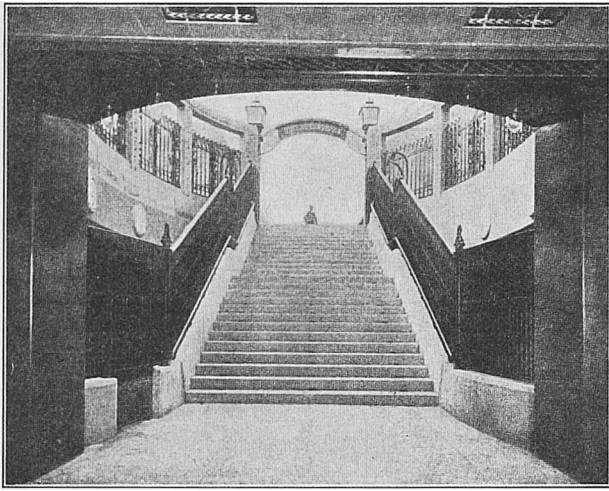


FIG. 7. ENTRANCE TO KAISERHOF STATION

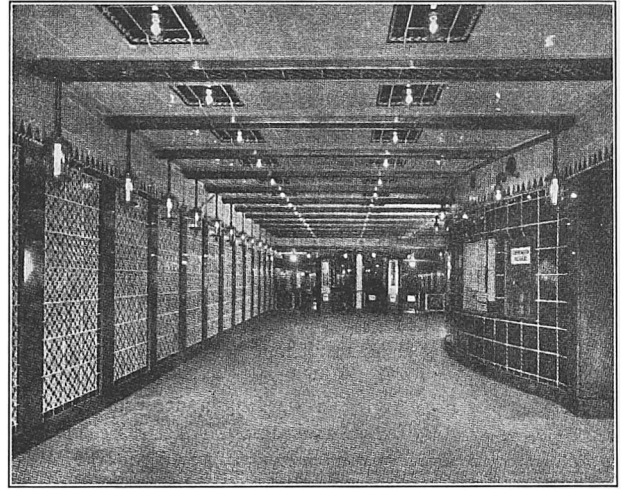


FIG. 8. TICKET OFFICE OF KAISERHOF STATION

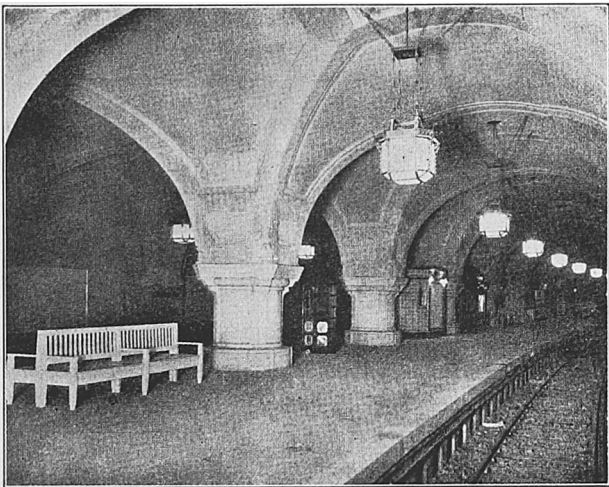


FIG. 9. HEIDELBERGER PLACE STATION

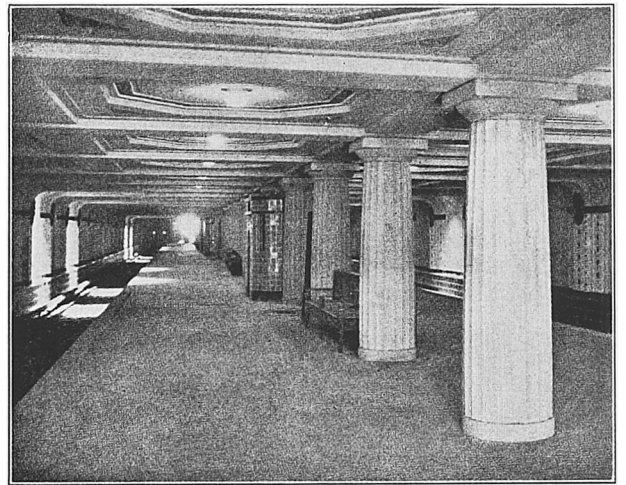


FIG. 10. BREITENBACH PLACE STATION

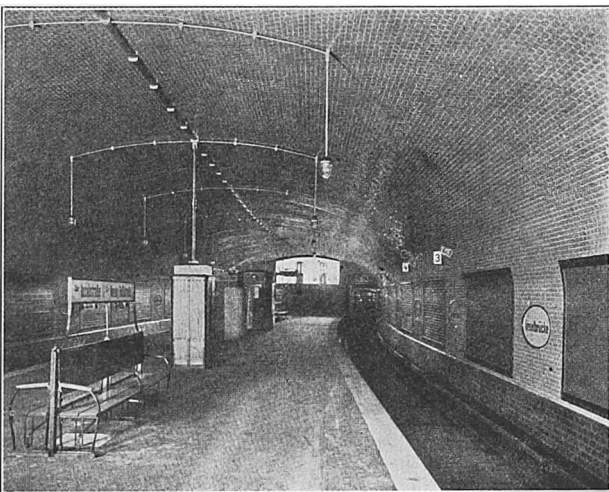


FIG. 11. INSELBRÜCKE STATION

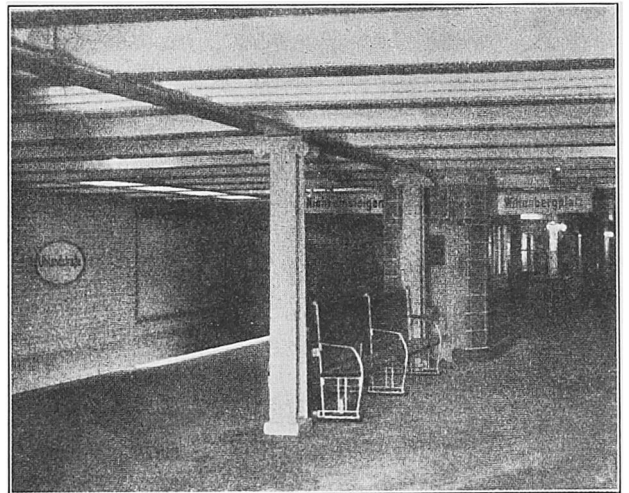


FIG. 12. UHLAND STREET STATION

strain the display of advertisements, making them subservient to the architectural composition.

We are amazed at the stately proportions of the station at Breitenbach Place, Fig. 10, with its interesting detail, its suggestive outline, giving, of course, but little chance for the advertiser without serious loss, practically ruining the significance of a noble design. Heidelberger Place, Fig. 9, see page 218, is a veritable basilica worthy of Byzantium. The vaulting is remarkable. The space available for advertisements is again limited, but even in these delightful and suggestive interiors, historic in their association, the name of the station is in the position of honor, not an incident in the treatment endangered by complicated enrichment which would belittle its significance.

Take a momentary trip to London and pause at the tube station under Piccadilly Circus, Fig. 6, or go north to Highgate, Fig. 5, see page 217. Here practically the same condition exists. In the English example, as advertisements are practically out of the question, the greater portion of the walling is devoted to the sign. It is almost continuous from end to end, with certain occasional breaks by way of a broad band of dark brick, crossing the tunnel barrel-hoop fashion. Altogether a very practical and decorative scheme, and, as in the Berlin examples, with the name in the line of vision when the passenger is seated.

SUBWAY STATIONS IN PARIS

It is with pleasure we visit Paris. Certainly, and at all times, and on the least provocation! What do we find? Are there subways in Paris?—some one asks with amazement. The idea of anything so utilitarian in a city ever Queen of the Arts, Mistress of Good Taste naturally prompts the question. And yet, the Frenchman is ever a utilitarian on the strict q. t., as he is a fighter and lover openly. We are delighted to speak of Paris in this instance, if only to salute heartily the spirit of the Academy, ever a whole-souled supporter of modernity, resting with confidence upon the natural instincts of a great race. Paris, in her capable manner, without being provoked at the interruption from so many engaging problems concerning her wonderful boulevards and parks, her remarkable squares and fountains, injects even into the subway depot problem a ray of sunshine, not only to gladden the heart of the traveler, but to devise a scheme whereby even the financial end of things is grateful. What does he do?

Oh, the rogue, the rogue, the Parisian is verily a rogue! Look at the views. Examine closely. At first go-off the scheme is seen to be wonderfully practical. The sign is more than four times as big as ours in New York or those in Berlin. Bigger is it and even more distinct than those of London, thanks to the lettering of glazed porcelain tile upon a ground of the official blue—the blue of midnight, which seems by common consent to have been selected as the direction label in the great thoroughfares of the world. Yes, primarily, to the Parisian the subway is ever a thoroughfare, not an adventure to be accompanied with anecdotes or any form of detached decoration, with mosaic, Romanesque or Renaissance in idea—plaques surrounded by delicately colored and partly glazed relief ornament. The Parisian's veneration for consistency prevents

any such indulgence. His realization of the proper purpose of the transit tunnel system and his love of big methods of attacking a problem is shown in his firm handling of the subway station as of a building and engineering project. Overhead the vault is one huge panel. The lower section is subdivided occasionally by door openings and to suit the sense of proportion, and incidentally, here's the subtlety of the thing, while he provides panels for advertisements the depot name appears crowning each panel. As though echoing the voice of the guard, calling out the station, we find the word Concorde, Concorde, Concorde, Fig. 4, see page 217. It suggests a benediction. The wondrous blue forms the borders of the panels, giving, as it were, an official approval or architectural recognition to the fantastic gossip within. Perhaps it is an appeal that we purchase the concoction ever associated with the cocoanut bean, which so often masquerades under the name of chocolate, or that we indulge in a visit to a theatre, or that we call at some favorite store. All this is here obviously by design not by accident. Advertising signs are not here an encumbrance, an afterthought, a public nuisance, defying the designer and his sense of the fitness of things, as with us in New York.

STATIONS AT BUDAPEST

So, briefly, might we continue, referring to Budapest, to Hamburg, to Glasgow, or calling upon a near neighbor of South America, visit Buenos Aires, loitering near the subway, so as to see their method of handling the problem. Budapest, beauty and pleasure-loving, as ever pays a liberal acknowledgment to exalted ideas. Everything possible is done by the authorities to induce the citizen to keep ever before him the thought that we are stimulated by our surroundings, impressed by them, and that individual character is often shaped, if not determined, by the character of our buildings, so that when we see a city we see a people. Budapest is known the world over as the mother city of the modern subway system. Although the underground of London preceded hers by many years it was, and some of it still is, too dreadful to speak of in the same breath! The art of breathing or seeing in the Metropolitan underground is a quality reserved to but a few. Budapest, a city which rewarded by a remission of taxes all who improved the thoroughfares by the addition of good buildings, in her own fashion constructed a subterranean passage-way that skips along just under the surface, being operated by an overhead electric trolley system. Its well-constructed kiosks have been a model for our own—and would we had followed their details more closely!

The lesson from a thoughtful study of the best subways of Europe is that they are intensely practical. The designer has accepted them as thoroughfares.

Returning to our own country, we cannot resist the opportunity to speak enthusiastically of the method of disposing satisfactorily of the problem, how to indicate names of stations in the Hudson Tunnel system. We are compelled to speak of the construction in order to show properly and fairly the way the name is displayed because it forms so unmistakably a part of the building. Take, for instance, the prominent center Thirty-third Street and Broadway, a junction of tubes by

which people approach the Pennsylvania depot or other centers of the city. The tube, which, by the way, includes four tracks and has two central and two outside platforms is canopied by a series of well-studied and well-proportioned arches. The vaulting is admirable. Some may shrug their shoulders and say it is only concrete. What of it? The concrete is so interestingly and firmly treated that it shows upon its surface the thoughtful way in which the moulds were constructed, and that the intersections of the vaulting scheme were correct. The proportion is excellent; it is a mighty good-looking station, take it how you will, and the sign—yes, the sign—where is it? And there must be two, remember, Broadway and Thirty-third Street. The magic word Broadway appears four times as the abacus to every cap, and under it written large, is the street number. And you say, "What of the advertising nuisance?" Exactly. What of it? Here it is not a nuisance! The advertisements appear in well-designed, well-placed countersunk panels upon the wall, each panel bordered with a large green molding of majolica. This adds wonderfully to the decorative appearance of the station. There is an architectural proportion about the whole depot from start to finish; and while it is intensely utilitarian, primarily utilitarian, if you will, it is yet good to look upon. Here, once again, is the spirit of the Romanesque basilica in a modern city, of material which was old when the Temple of Titus was erected. It is another illustration of the adoption of a classic idea to modern uses.

WE ASK OF A STATION A NAME

We examine the existing subway stations of the New York service, the section now in use, with no little disappointment because of its amazing preference for decorative in place of utilitarian ideals, and yet we dislike to criticise severely because we were so mighty glad to get a subway. The thoroughfares were, and for that matter, are so crowded, the difficulty of reaching the varying sections of the city is so great. We find in our stations the old revered idea of treating the wall surfaces as a school thesis, as a decorative problem, so that we have *ornamentation* instead of *information*. The main things we ask of a station is its name. We are a little impatient when we have to search for it. It should be there and obvious. It should hold the center of the stage, not as an incident among the kaleidoscopic conglomeration and phantasmagoria which add no little to the perplexity of the traveler. It is not enough to point to Fourteenth Street, say, or for that matter to the City Hall or to Fulton Street, and ask us to look with admiration on the decorative treatment. We object to the treatment. We find ourselves resenting the costly material, the high base of Numidian or other richly colored marble, the broad pilaster with its paneling, its rectangular enclosure supporting a cartouche with acanthus-leaf ornament, a narrow entablature, and the rest of it, because it has no place here. In spite of the fact that when built it promised well, it is to-day stale and unprofitable. The low relief ornament has formed a splendid resting-place for dust, so that to-day our attempt to see that local color is defied, and we have little more than a thin plume of mud, through which, at times, thanks to a friendly glow from a sidewalk light a view of the

original tone is disclosed. We are forced first to see the advertisements; we see them wherever we turn. That is the trouble—the accent is upon the announcement of *goods for sale*, not upon the *station name*.

To be fair to the designer of this section, we must remember, however, the conflict between the authorities and the fact that advertisements were not intended for the early stations. Hence, no provision was made of them. Indeed many things connected with the enterprise were experimental and no one man can be blamed. There is no use in criticizing the past except to call attention to the disappointing condition of the new section shortly to be opened and to express the hope that immediate changes will be made, and that errors will be avoided in the future. The subway idea is no longer an experiment here or abroad. And, as by common consent the traveler the world over finds himself turning for information to the column, the structural iron post of the station, here is the place for the sign.

HOW THEY MIGHT BE IMPROVED

Let it be big. Yes, let it be big—the omnipresent feature of the station. Instead of the rough letter painted upon the posts in haphazard fashion, competing with the projecting flange and bolt head and the inevitable shadow, and often of such varying sizes that we find ourselves wondering if it be the performance of an ambidextrous personality trying to do funny stunts or simply an indolent sign-writer with a sub-contract, there should be enameled signs that have an unmistakable character. This enameled sign should overlap the column a few inches and be oval or circular or oblong as seems wise. This should be applied to all posts not only through the station but extending a hundred feet beyond, that the traveler may be informed as to his location even though, through the exigencies of the occasion, the train may be forced to overrun the end of the platform. For a few cents per foot this enameled sign could be provided and so placed, possibly at a flaring angle or elliptical in plan, as to catch the light. Some such contrivance is well within the reach of a resourceful designer.

We have waited, and apparently in vain, in the hope that the new extension of the subway would develop a better arrangement in the stations. We are disappointed at the Fourth Avenue development now open. The name is once more hard to find; the authorities are still toying with decorative schemes. We make a plea for saner ideals, following the lead of the engineer, who is swayed by utilitarian needs rather than by decorative luxuries. Away with confectionery colors, tones, symphonies and nocturnes! Close the color box and ring for the manufacturer of enameled iron signs. We say this advisedly, not because of any lack of love for color. On the contrary, we miss here the advertisement and its inevitable humanizing association. We welcome the announcement of goods for sale when properly placed and with due regard to the occasion, to the name of the station and to sundry other fundamental considerations. The advertisement is a hundred times better than the great self-conscious area of glazed brick with its diaper of dust blown in from numerous ventilating shafts. It is the voice of the people, naïve in its appeal, at times winsome and attractive, occa-

sionally ridiculous, but always interesting. Besides, it helps pay the running expenses!

Turn to Paris to see what they do, because Paris has the one system that seems to have solved the problem satisfactorily.

At the same time we venture to suggest, if only to resist the subway's mad intoxication, the wild racket ever associated with rush hours, through which the wearied cry of the conductor cannot be expected to penetrate, that an automatic enunciator system be adopted. Let the city offer to the indomitable inventor of America a premium for the production of some such device for the which

we have been crying in the wilderness for years.

Above all are we mighty glad to get the subway. It is a wonderful thing. By its complicated network of burrows dodging under foundations of skyscrapers, under roadways and over bridges and at times even dipping under the East River, twisting and twirling in its labyrinth of intercommunicating passage-ways we are able in a few minutes to go miles and all for a few pennies. Where would we be without it? How would we keep our appointments up-town or down-town or out-of-town? It is indeed a marvelous tribute to the resourcefulness of our engineers.

Samuel Howe

THE ÆSTHETIC IDEAL SKETCH OF A PHILOSOPHY OF BEAUTY

By FR. ROUSSEL-DESPIERRES

Translated from the French

BOOK I—CHAPTER II—*Continued*

MORAL autonomy flows from intellectual autonomy just as this flows from doubt. Doubt has another consequence: liberty of external conduct. Absolute in its principle, among its prerogatives this liberty abandons to autonomy only that alone which is necessary for their defence.

As to complete liberty: that is the right to use it in all its force, and that is the right of nature. All the wills-to-live in the universe fight with each other; life devours life, but life itself opposes to the right of the force of nature the revolt of all the individualities and their right of existence. To make an attack on the being of a single individual is to attack nature. To cause individual right to overcome life is to conform oneself to the universal will of living nature; is it not to recognize by that very fact the only possible groundwork of a natural morality as well as of a social morality?

The explanation of human society lies in the accord of the right of force with the right of living. That each right shall incline itself before an equal right—that is indeed the initial principle of morality. Politics ought to be the art to assure each person the maximum of liberty compatible with the equal liberty of all. Society, the city, family, associations are not ends in themselves; there is no end except the individual, and all the forms, all the social groupings, have no other motive for subsisting save to facilitate the development of the individual.

But this conception of individual autonomy is a little narrow. There is a higher, more respectable individuality than that of the human being, and that is the individuality of the idea. That which makes man respectable to man is the will of the Ideal; all minorities have a right to a respect for their faith. The idea is universal in its order; respect for the idea is the essential interest of all, because it may become the common good of all. Individual life only acquires value in the service to the idea; the safety of the idea is incomparably more precious than the preservation of some living unities.

And loftier than the idea, and more respectable than it, is the moral will, the radiant blossoming of the ideal!

Here an objection: if the principle of autonomy erects the individual into the unique judge of its morality, the unique arbiter of its conduct, ought one not fear that a liberty of such a kind might degenerate, and that the individual might authorize himself to follow all his caprices, even those which are culpable?

To this I answer at first that Social Law interposes to prevent individual wills from harming the rights of others. On the other hand, however, it is a contradiction that one individual should accord to himself the right to accomplish any act which he believes contrary to morality. The idea of morality implies an obligation to act or to abstain from action. Every man who shall disobey his conception of what is good will feel himself culpable.

But, may one further say, moral conceptions will be different, and thus the purest wills are liable to cause a profound disorder in the world? No, I would answer again—since the social law will place an obstacle against the brutal conflict of wills. The diversity of moral aspirations, on the contrary, will offer this first advantage of defending the extreme diversity of human needs, and this other advantage, greater still, of offering to all temperaments, all the souls, with an ideal suited to their own faculties, an occasion to deploy all the energy of a passionate will. Far from being a danger, moral independence, I believe, is the essential condition of an infinite development of morality.

Still, I admit that the exercise of liberty may be disagreeable to many people. The institution of Moral Directors is without doubt a necessity in the future. The vanished religion and weak souls which are the more numerous will have need of a support. That is one of the tasks, perhaps the noblest task of the philosophers and of all those whom a lofty ideal animates—to undertake the moral direction